

PREPARED STATEMENT

OF

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Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee, it is my pleasure to be here today to discuss with you the Department's ongoing aggressive support of programs for our wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans and their families. Secretary Gates has affirmed that next to the war itself, support for our wounded, ill and injured is the Department's highest priority. We have made a lot of progress in the last two years, but our work is not done. We very much appreciate your support of our on-going efforts.

I'm here today to relate the Department's recent establishment of a capability to permanently sustain enhanced joint oversight and management of wounded warrior matters and to continue supporting operations of the Department of Defense /Department of Veterans Affairs Senior Oversight Committee (SOC). Let me first provide some background to talk about how we organized initially, and then I will turn to our new alignment, designed to institutionalize and enrich our oversight and management of wounded warrior matters.

BACKGROUND

Senior Oversight Committee:

In the spring of 2007, Secretary Gates requested an oversight committee of senior military and civilian officials be created to make certain that recommendations and mandates from a number of sources, including a Presidential Commission, and legislation were addressed. As a result, the Senior Oversight Committee (SOC) for the Wounded, Ill, and Injured (WII) was established. The SOC is co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and brings together on a regular basis the most senior decision makers from both Departments to ensure timely decisions and actions. The SOC is the main decision body for oversight, strategy, and integration of proposed measures for DoD and VA efforts to improve seamlessness across an injured service member's recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration continuum.

The two Departments and the SOC have been in the process of implementing more than 600 recommendations from six major studies and the FY2008 and FY2009 NDAA. My colleagues

will discuss specific accomplishments, but the initiatives to accomplish these requirements fit within a context of the following fundamental changes:

- Increasing collaboration between DoD and VA on issues to deliver a world class continuum of care for our WII.
- Revamping the approach to care and case management, and fully embracing a customer-centered process that includes involvement of the family and caregivers through the use of the Recovery Care Program and the Federal Recovery Coordination Program.
- Increasing the sharing of medical and beneficiary information between DoD and VA.
- Recognizing psychological fitness is as important as physical fitness.

Overarching Integrated Product Team:

The SOC established an Overarching Integrated Product Team (OIPT) to closely track and coordinate recommendations from studies and reports for successful implementation of appropriate support and care for WII Service members. The OIPT reports directly to the SOC and is responsible for coordinating, integrating, and synchronizing actions. The OIPT's mission is to:

- Act as the primary DoD and VA coordinating and functioning agent for all recommendations from reports by commissions, task forces, Congressional studies, and NDAA mandates.
- Coordinate analysis and review of recommendations and mandates, and present consolidated decision packages to the SOC.
- Refine strategic program guidance and joint planning objectives in conjunction with the Joint Strategic Plan of the Joint Executive Council (JEC).
- Approve plans, timelines, and proposed actions, and report these to the SOC.
- Maintain close coordination, and integration where possible, with the Military Services, Joint Staff, and all pertinent Federal Departments/Agencies with respect to their efforts to improve care and benefits for WII Service members and their families.
- Coordinate public relations and communications efforts internal to DOD and VA and external with outside Departments/Agencies, Congress, veterans support organizations, the media, and the public.
- Review legislation for actionable and/or reportable items.

- Maintain an electronic database for the complete tracking of actionable items.
- Recommend resourcing solutions.

Lines of Actions: (LOA)

To organize for responsibility and accountability, the SOC established eight lines of action (LoAs) and assigned the recommendations and mandates consistent with the LoAs missions, which are as follows:

Line of Action 1: Disability Evaluation System. Develop and establish one solution for a DoD and VA Disability Evaluation System using one integrated disability rating system that is seamless, transparent, and administered jointly by both Departments. That system must remain flexible to evolve and update as trends in injuries and supporting medical documentation and treatment necessitates. Streamline the transition process for the Service member separating from DoD and entering the VA system of benefits.

Line of Action 2: Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Address improvements in consistency and capability surrounding TBI and psychological health (PH) across the full continuum of care within DoD and VA. The effort has been on the collaborative development and continuous improvement of service member/veteran-focused programs dedicated to TBI and PH prevention, protection, identification, diagnosis, treatment, recovery, research, and rehabilitation.

Line of Action 3: Case and Care Management. Coordinate medical and non-medical care, rehabilitation, benefits, and delivery of services and support that will effectively guide and facilitate Service members, veterans, their families, and caregivers throughout the entire continuum of care.

Line of Action 4: DoD/VA Data Sharing. Ensure appropriate demographic, personnel, and medical information on Service members, veterans, and their family members is visible, accessible, and understandable through secure and interoperable DoD and VA information management systems.

Line of Action 5: Facilities. Ensure facilities are provided that deliver the care Service members and veterans have earned and deserve. In accordance with existing laws and regulations, establish standards for the inspection of quarters used by WWII Service members; conduct an assessment of the existing DOD medical support infrastructure; and summarize inspection results to Congress. Finally, examine the process of establishing and maintaining medical facility design criteria and make recommendations for improvement.

Line of Action 6: Clean Sheet Review. Provide WWII Service members and their families the best quality care with a compassionate, fair, timely, and non-adversarial disability adjudication process. An ideal process will be developed for providing care and benefits to WWII Service members, veterans, and their families. The ideal process will not be constrained by current laws, policies, regulations, organizations, infrastructure, or resources.

Line of Action 7: Comprehensive Legislation and Public Affairs. Coordinate the development of comprehensive legislation that will provide the best possible care and treatment for WWII Service members and their families. Additionally, keep the public informed of significant accomplishments and events.

Line of Action 8: Personnel, Pay, and Financial Support. Ensure each seriously wounded, ill, or injured Service member has a level of compensation, benefits, and financial support to maintain their dignity and support their recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

Wounded, Ill, and Injured Senior Oversight Committee (WWII SOC Staff Office)

Given the scope and magnitude of the issues addressed and the complexity of integrating recommendations within DoD and VA, the SOC directed the creation of a full time joint-Departmental support staff. In the interest of time, the WWII SOC Staff Office was staffed with civilian detailees from both DoD and VA, borrowed military manpower, and contractor personnel. It was led by a senior executive detailed from the Department of the Army and a VA detailed senior executive as the Chief of Staff. The WWII SOC Staff Office provided assistance, advice, and expertise to facilitate changes to policies, procedures, or legislation so that all

recommendations relative to the recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration of WII Service members and their families were effectively and efficiently resolved or addressed. The Staff Office served as the integration focal point to both the SOC and OIPT and tracked the actions overseen by the SOC. The Staff Office was charged with providing senior level review and advising the SOC on the progress of the WII program. The SOC delegated authority to the Staff Office to task deliverables directly to the LoA representatives to ensure SOC requirements were met. Within the Staff Office, a group of DOD and VA personnel jointly served as points-of-contact within the eight LoAs. In this role, LoA liaisons were responsible for facilitating communication between their LoA and the Staff Office. While the Staff Office served as the administrative body facilitating the efforts of the LOAs and ensuring milestones were met, the substantive work assigned by the SOC was accomplished by the LOAs.

LOA Assignments/Staffing:

When we initially categorized the recommendations to be addressed within the LoAs, we assigned LOA lead responsibilities to senior Department officials who, along with VA co-leads, energized their staffs to meet the requirements of SOC-assignments. In some cases, lines of action responsibilities were not clearly in any particular senior official's portfolio, but implementing the recommendations became a Department priority so we made the best functional fit possible. For instance, LoAs 1, 3 and 8 were assigned to senior officials in OSD, Navy and Air Force, respectively, none of whom had complete Department responsibilities beforehand for oversight and management of WII SOC recommendations assigned in these LoAs.

As with the WII SOC Staff Office, in many cases, staffing this newly created organization to support the SOC required detailing military and civilian help to LOA leads. Of course, the offices from which these detailees came have had to adjust work and resources accordingly.

The Joint Executive Council (JEC)

The SOC and its supporting structure were designed to focus on the elimination of deficiencies in the wounded warrior continuum of care. The JEC drives the entire panoply of DoD/VA interagency strategy and policy interactions. It has been co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary of

the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. It oversees the efforts of a Health Executive Council, Benefits Executive Council and Interagency Program Office and all other councils or work groups designated by the co-chairs. The JEC works to remove barriers and challenges which impede DoD and VA collaborative efforts, asserts and supports mutually beneficial opportunities to improve all business practices, ensures high quality cost effective services for both DoD and VA beneficiaries, and facilitates opportunities to improve resource utilization. All this is spear-headed and monitored through a joint strategic planning process that results in recommendations to the Secretaries on the strategic direction for the joint coordination and sharing efforts between and within the two Departments for all overlapping matters. This year, we ensured that the SOC actions and milestones were laid into the JEC Strategic Plan.

ESTABLISHING PERMANENT ORGANIZATIONS

After almost two years of SOC operations and achieving what we believe are significant positive outcomes, it became evident that to further enrich oversight and management of this priority mission and to posture the Department for sustaining this level of support to our WWII Service members and their families, a permanent structure was needed. The Department did not have full-time executive leaders dedicated to DoD/VA collaboration and transition. In order to improve on the integration of DOD and VA into a single team to address wounded warrior needs as well as the integration of these issues into the management framework of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, the Department has created two new permanent offices in DoD. We believe that establishing these two offices will keep support of the wounded warrior at the forefront in our daily efforts and priorities and give us greater ability to improve the continuum of care with VA for all service members. Additionally, further teaming with our colleagues, we've co-located our two new offices with their VA counterpart liaisons, thereby enhancing our synergistic efforts.

Transition Policy and Care Coordination Office

The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness established late last year the Office of Transition Policy and Care Coordination (TPCC). Major General Keith Meurlin (USAF) was

appointed Acting Director. The TPCC assumed responsibility for policy and programs related to disability systems, Service member transition to veteran status, separations from the Armed Forces, case and care coordination, and pay and benefits entitlements for wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans and their families. These assigned responsibilities include the totality of functions assigned to SOC LoAs 1, 3 and 8, which were originally assigned to Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Military Personnel Policy, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Force Management and Integration, respectively. Additionally, subsets of other responsibilities formerly assigned to Deputy Under Secretaries for Military Personnel Policy and Military Community and Family Policy are now included in the TPCC's portfolio. TPCC assumed responsibility for management and monitoring of performance against DoD/VA Benefits Executive Council (BEC) goals and for coordinating with VA in support of BEC activities. Additionally, TPCC has the authority to enter into agreements, within the scope of assigned responsibilities, with VA and represent OUSD (P&R) as a member on councils and interagency forums established under the authority of the DoD/VA Joint Executive Council (JEC), the BEC and the SOC. The TPCC is up and running and keeping pace with meeting SOC, JEC and BEC requirements. Staffing military and government civilian positions is ongoing, expecting full staff to be in place by the end of this calendar year. Thirty-eight personnel will be re-assigned or hired to accomplish these duties.

Office of Strategic Planning and Performance Management/Executive Secretariat to the SOC/JEC

At the same time the TPCC was formed, the Office of Strategic Planning and Performance Management/Executive Secretariat to the SOC/JEC was established. Mr. Clarence Johnson, a Senior Executive Service member, was appointed Acting Director. The Executive Secretariat, which aligned some DoD staff—mostly temporary contractor or military—from the WII SOC Staff Office, is up and running as well. We expect to hire a permanent Senior Executive Service Director and the office should be fully staffed by the end of this year. We are adding 14 full time permanent personnel to support this function. This office has many of the responsibilities formerly accomplished by the WII SOC Staff Office, including tracking progress of SOC-directed actions (LOA liaison responsibility as before remains); tracking the status and

accomplishment of the more than 600 actions embraced by the two Departments; and in collaboration with VA counterparts, establishing SOC and JEC agendas, scheduling SOC, OIPT and JEC meetings and supporting the oversight functions of the SOC, OIPT and JEC. Additionally, this Office has broadened responsibility to provide the planning and management function for DoD's involvement in the Joint Executive Council, including the Department's role in the development of the JEC Joint Strategic Plan and ensuring the accomplishment of actions identified in that plan. Finally, this Office has responsibility for ensuring the integration of these plans and actions into the structure of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness strategic planning and performance management processes. The Executive Secretariat reports to the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Plans.

OTHER REALIGNMENT NOTES AND CLOSING

I earlier spoke about the alignment of LoAs from the initial SOC support structure to the permanent structure. I indicated that LoAs 1, 3, and 8 were aligned from disparate owners to the TPCC. With the exception of LOA 6 whose work has been completed, the other LOAs remained in place with their missions held constant and their responsibilities captured in SOC LOA assignments.

From the SOC perspective, LOA 4 issues continue to be administered with representatives from DoD and VA. From the JEC standpoint, electronic media was highlighted as outlined in Public Law 110-181 – FY 2008, NDAA, Section 1635, with the establishment of the Interagency Program Office (IPO) to focus the integration of electronic health information for the DOD and VA. Rear Admiral Gregory Timberlake has been assigned as the Acting Director with a permanent Senior Executive Service solution being pursued and the Deputy position is planned to be filled by a VA Senior Executive Service employee.

As we sustain and enrich our support to the wounded warrior, we aim to continue to build upon the partnership with VA to jointly tackle major issues that emerge in the transition of our service

members from active duty to veteran status. Our new structure actually streamlines our processes for DoD/VA collaboration, and progress continues.

Under this new alignment, the SOC has met twice and dealt with very substantive issues. Our two cabinet secretaries chaired a SOC in February. The OIPT continues to meet frequently, bringing key issues to discuss and prepare for the SOC forum and reporting on SOC milestones and achievements. In the future our collaboration should be enhanced through the increased focus on the JEC, made possible by our new organizational structure, and by implementation of a new concept – a Principals' JEC, which would be chaired by our two Secretaries when the business of the JEC requires their personal involvement.

While we are pleased with the quality of effort and progress made, we fully understand that there is much more to be done. We believe we have, thus, postured ourselves to continue providing world-class support to our warriors and veterans while allowing us to focus on our respective core missions. Our dedicated, selfless service members, veterans and their families deserve the very best, and we pledge to give our very best during their recovery, rehabilitation and return to duty or to the society they chose to defend.

Thank you for your generous support of our wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans and their families. I look forward to your questions.